

From: [Clare Crowson \(Clare@floridapromise.org\)](mailto:Clare@floridapromise.org) <ClareAF@meridianstrategiesllc.com>

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NATIONAL NEWS

Governors Bush And Wise Announce Blueprint For Digital Education Initiative

Pelican Post

By: Jamison Beuerman

October 25, 2011

<http://www.thepelicanpost.org/2011/10/25/governors-bush-and-wise-announce-blueprint-for-digital-education-initiative/>

'Roadmap for Reform' contains detailed recommendations for state policymakers on digital learning

This past week, former Florida Governor and chairman of [Digital Learning Now!](#) Jeb Bush and former West Virginia Governor Bob Wise unveiled an expansive plan for utilizing technology to achieve educational progress entitled the "[Roadmap for Reform: Digital Learning.](#)" The detailed 72-point plan aims to bridge the considerable gap between student needs and available state resources using technology and digital learning.

Currently, less than 10 percent of the nation's students experience the benefits of digital learning, while a far greater percentage are in failing schools with ineffective and inadequate teachers. The Roadmap for Reform is designed to customize education for the individual student so he can learn at his pace whether in school or at home, an opportunity currently not afforded to the average student.

According to the Roadmap, ten elements are necessary for High Quality Digital Learning: 1) Student Access 2) No Barriers To Access 3) Personalized Learning 4) Advancement (According to progress achieved) Quality Content 6) Quality Instruction 7) Quality Choices (access to multiple digital learning providers) Assessment and Accountability 9) Funding and 10) Infrastructure. These elements are then subdivided into 72 specific guidelines by which elected officials and lawmakers can advance digital learning.

The ideal benefits yielded by digital and online learning are profound. Students are no longer restricted by time, nor are they confined to the classroom. They can engage in learning outside of pedagogical methods of teachers which may fail to meet the unique demands of individual students. Furthermore, emphasizing technology will alleviate the strained resources of public schools.

Both full-time and part-time online learning engages students in ways that classroom instruction sometimes fails to do, whether due to poor instruction or overburdened class sizes. Evolving and innovative methods are needed to garner student interest, and the array of interactive programs and software technology providers should be taken advantage of in public education.

Also included is a [state-by-state report card](#), which comprehensively assesses the progress of every state on each individual metric of the ten Roadmap elements. [According to the results](#), Louisiana appears poised to make significant progress if it continues to embrace digital learning, though it needs improvement especially in areas of funding and infrastructure. This year brought the arrival of Louisiana's [first online charter school](#), Baton Rouge's Louisiana Connections Academy, with others slated to follow. For a state roundly criticized for its public education, digital learning is an important component with potentially transformative implications.

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eLearning Update: Private Providers Need Public Oversight

Education Week
By: Ian Quillen
October 25, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2011/10/an_examination_of_the_growing.html

An examination of the growing field of online K-12 education finds that the industry—and particularly the for-profit sector within it—is in need of more public regulation, and then recommends four reforms to fulfill that need.

[The report](#), out of the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder, also says the need is exacerbated because online K-12 education is growing most quickly where it is least regulated. And while challenges affect bodies as large as the federal government and as small as local education agencies, they are greatest for states, the report says, because states sanction and charter online providers.

The report fits into a growing body of work suggesting ways states must adapt to facilitate online education that meets quality standards. For example, the [Digital Learning Now](#) initiative headed by former governors Jeb Bush (R-Fla.) and Bob Wise (D-W.Va.) [has pushed](#) for states to conform to 10 key suggested reforms it says would make their education systems more digital-friendly.

Reforms recommended by the NEPC report cover four areas: measures to ensure the authenticity of student work; regulations covering teacher certification and practice, demonstration of student progress, and school funding structures; audits of private providers to determine exactly the extent of cost savings possible through online learning; and accreditation measures for online learning providers beyond what currently exist.

Of note, the study is careful to differentiate between virtual learning and blended learning. While previous research has found blended approaches to be capable of providing students with an education that leads to comparable test scores to students that receive face-to-face instruction, that research applies little to fully online instruction, the report says.

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Study finds flaws in virtual education, including motives of for-profit virtual schools

News Service of Florida

By: Lilly Rockwell

October 26, 2011

<http://staugustine.com/florida-news/2011-10-25/study-finds-flaws-virtual-education-including-motives-profit-virtual-schools#.Tqf-yJsg-QI>

October 26, 2011 - 12:01am Study finds flaws in virtual education, including motives of for-profit virtual schools

Motives of for-profit virtual schools questioned

TALLAHASSEE — A new study is sounding alarms at the quick expansion of virtual education programs in states like Florida, saying for-profit companies are pushing states to offer full-time virtual instruction paid for by state tax dollars with little research on the quality of these programs.

The study, written by two professors at the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and released Tuesday, highlights a number of emerging problems with the growth of online learning.

The study raises questions about the quality of virtual education, such as the lack of supervision, as well as the financial motivations of for-profit companies that have pushed state legislatures to expand virtual instruction.

“Private corporations, most of which are for-profit, have recognized a huge potential market in virtual schooling,” wrote the study’s authors, who urge states to more closely examine how much they pay for virtual instruction.

Florida has long been at the forefront of virtual education. There is the state-backed Florida Virtual School, which offers full-time and part-time virtual classes paid for by taxpayer dollars and each school district in the state is required to offer virtual classes, either through its own program, the Florida Virtual School, or private companies.

And this year, a new state law requires all public high school students to take an online course prior to graduation as well as allow charter schools to offer full-time “virtual” classes.

Other states have also rapidly expanded their full-time virtual programs in a way that allows more private companies to compete, such as by allowing “virtual” charter schools.

In 2010, the study says, 27 states offered full-time virtual schools, up from 20 states six years ago.

A number of private companies have lobbied for this expansion, such as K12 Inc. and Educational Options Inc., which are approved by the Florida Department of Education to offer online courses in the state.

One Florida-based expert on virtual education has conducted studies of virtual education that show students don't perform worse on tests in online classes than in traditional courses.

Cathy Cavanaugh, a University of Florida professor who studies virtual education, said one study comparing part-time virtual students with full-time virtual students showed the full-time students performed better.

Cavanaugh cautioned against reading too much into that Missouri-based study, saying it wasn't an apples to apples comparison. Part-time students had the added challenge of navigating two educational systems, she said.

In Florida, the biggest provider of online education in the state is the state-run Florida Virtual School. It is funded based on the number of successfully completed courses. Last year, it served 122,700 students.

Though the survey suggested online instruction made it easier for students to cheat, a Florida Virtual School administrator said steps are taken to prevent students from taking credit for work that isn't theirs.

Polly Haldeman, the senior manager for district relations with Florida Virtual School, said the school runs essays and other written answers through TurnItIn.com, a service that compares how authentic a student's answer is. Instructors also check in monthly and can give oral pop quizzes, she said.

"It is not all bubbling in the answers and writing out the problems," Haldeman said. "It is recording and taking pictures and a multiple of ways to demonstrate mastery of (the subject)."

The study focused primarily on concerns over private companies offering virtual education courses rather than state-backed providers such as Florida Virtual School. The study suggests states audit these private providers to determine how much money is required to offer online courses and whether the companies are being overpaid.

Cavanaugh said she shares the concerns raised about the rise of for-profit virtual education companies.

"It is a concern," Cavanaugh said. "I think we have learned that lesson through health care. There are different motivations when profit is brought into a public service."

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Study: States' Teacher Evaluation Policies Are a-Changin'

Education Week

By: Liana Heitin

October 26, 2011

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/teacherbeat/2011/10/study_states_teacher_evaluatio.html

By guest blogger Liana Heitin

The National Council on Teacher Quality released a [study](#) today examining the "changing landscape" of teacher-evaluation policies—which have proliferated in the last two years—across the states.

The report details some of the trends I addressed [in a state roundup published in July](#). Those trends include a dramatic increase in the number of states tying teacher evaluations to student achievement and indications that there's continued legislative interest in making evaluations more rigorous, despite the fact that Race to the Top incentives aren't currently on the table.

In a webinar for education reporters, Sandi Jacobs, vice president of Washington-based NCTQ, explained that 24 states and the District of Columbia now require annual evaluations for all teachers, while in 2009, only 15 states had that requirement.

Jacobs also said that 23 states and D.C. now require teacher evaluations to include objective evidence of student learning. Of those, 17 states and D.C. require achievement be included in a "significant" way, and 13 states require the measures to be the "preponderant" criterion (that is, no other factor can count more than student achievement measures). Just two years ago, only four states required student achievement measures be the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations.

That's a lot of action for just two years, Jacobs said. "Between 2007 and 2009, we didn't really see the needle moving at all" on these policies.

However, Jacobs noted that between states, there's "a great deal of variation in design" for these teacher evaluation systems. For instance, Delaware and Louisiana have a single statewide system, while Arizona, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, and Ohio allow districts to create their own systems. Some states offer a system and allow districts to opt-in, and others let districts design the systems but the state must approve them.

Jacobs listed what the NCTQ considers the key "early lessons" for states embarking on these sorts of policy changes. Among other things, she said:

- "Teacher effectiveness measures don't have to be perfect to be useful. Some people are concerned that not every i is dotted

and they're rolling out these systems. But keep in mind how unsatisfactory the [previous] systems have been." She added that an evaluation system "doesn't have to grind to a halt to be fine-tuned." (See my recent story on [Tennessee's teacher-evaluation system](#), which is causing an uproar among teachers because it is far from fine-tuned.)

- States are struggling with finding measures of student-growth for non-tested grades and subjects.
- Teachers need feedback on their evaluations.
- Whenever possible, states and districts should use third-party evaluators.
- Teachers "are nervous, they're hearing a lot of things that are scaring them. So it's important for states to think about that communication strategy." (Again, see the [Tennessee story](#).)
- Evaluations should focus on everyone—not just low-performers.

Jacobs pointed to D.C.'s IMPACT evaluation system as a "strong example" of where such systems should be headed.

Jane Hannaway, vice president of the American Institutes of Research and director of the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, followed up Jacobs' comments with praise for both the NCTQ report and the trajectory of state policies.

"I think the change that has happened in the last two years in this country is remarkable," she said. The increase in political interest around teacher evaluation represents "a real awakening." It's important to note that AIR does have some vested interest in such systems—the group has been awarded contracts to develop student-growth measures for the evaluation systems in [New York](#) and [Florida](#).

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STATE NEWS

School District Says No To Teacher Bonus Grant

National Public Radio

By: Rob Manning

October 25, 2011

<http://www.npr.org/2011/10/25/141693540/oregon-school-district-says-no-to-performance-based-bonus?ft=1&f=1013>

An Oregon school district has rejected more than \$2.5 million in federal funds. Oregon City — just south of Portland — turned down money that would have given performance-based pay bonuses to teachers, a controversial part of the Obama administration's education policy.

It's called the Teacher Incentive Fund, and it's meant to reward results. Oregon City actually applied for the money it's now turned down.

The government offered the \$2.5 million for teacher bonuses based on evaluations and their students' test scores. The school district had actually been working on those issues before it got the grant.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan visited Oregon earlier this month and told an Oregon City teacher who complained about the grant's rules that he understood. He also said he wanted his department to be less bureaucratic and to support innovation. "I don't have any specific answer, but I'd love to continue the conversation, see if there's some flexibility," Duncan said.

After Duncan's visit there was some back and forth between the Obama administration and Oregon City on how the money should be spent. But ultimately, the Department of Education said it should be given to teachers as direct bonuses. It also said it wanted to restrict the funds to schools with lots of low-income students, which would have excluded half of Oregon City's schools.

Oregon City wanted to put the money into a shared fund, possibly for teachers' continuing education.

Nancy Noice, president of the Oregon City teachers union, said one solution the feds proposed was that employees hand their bonuses back to the district. But Noice says that didn't seem workable.

"We look at it and I think, 'OK, I've been cut 15 days, my salary has been frozen on top of that, so it's actually a huge decrease in my salary. My benefits have been cut. I would get a bonus check, and now the district wants me to give that back,'" Noice says.

She says a team of administrators, teachers and staff ultimately couldn't agree on a workable solution. But she admits it was tough to turn down the money.

"Heartbreaking. Heart-wrenching. It was a difficult decision either way," she says.

Noice says she's already heard from many people in Oregon City, many of them saying the district should not have turned down the money. But she says others were skeptical of performance-based pay, and applaud the union and school district for saying "no."

As for the \$2.5 million, the Department of Education is seeing if there's another school district in Oregon that wants the money and will play by its rules.

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World-Class Schools for Iowa

KIMT TV

By: SaVannah Reading

October 24, 2011

<http://www.kimt.com/content/localnews/iowanews/story/World-Class-Schools-for-Iowa/Nxg6SWKvdUKp-s8MHvSeVw.csp>

MASON CITY, IA-Iowa leaders are traveling around the state trying to promote a better education for your children.

Governor Terry Branstad and Lieutenant Governor Kim Reynolds are talking with folks around North Iowa.

Well the blueprint for education is all about providing a world class learning environment all across the state.

There are three basic points.

Attract great teachers and principals, raise expectations and promote innovation.

As the world we live in becomes more intertwined, the push for a top notch education becomes even greater.

And that's what Iowa Governor Terry Branstad says his plan will give to students in his state.

Branstad says, "Students must be better prepared and they must be better equipped to succeed in an international market place where the really good paying jobs demand much more from the workers than they did in the past."

The governor's blueprint for education calls for major systemic changes.

Something he says takes time, but is much needed.

Branstad says, "It's about raising student achievement. But it is also about something else as well. We want to make sure teaching is a highly respected profession that it deserves to be."

The plan raises teacher pay and there are higher expectations for both students and teachers.

New testing systems would be put in place to make sure kids aren't going through the system without the knowledge they need.

Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds says, "So children learn to read by the end of third grade. If children don't learn to read by then they would be retained and provided more intensive instruction."

The governor says the plan would fuel innovation and allow for charter schools and online learning options.

Something both republicans and democrats can agree on.

State Representative Sharon Steckman says, "I think we all have a common goal of improving education in Iowa and we'll see how we get there when the time comes in January."

Representative Steckman is chair of the house education committee.

She's glad to see education at the forefront and says there are areas of the plan that both sides can agree on.

And other education leaders agree.

State Board of Education President Rosie Hussey says, "I think that it is a good program. I think we need to work out the differences and the details of it, but I do think we need to start taking action."

Generating a conversation about this plan is exactly what the governor and other leaders are hoping this brings about.

They want to get input from parents, educators, students about what they believe Iowa schools need.

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Opinion: Don't blame Illinois' education failures on NCLB

Journal-Courier

By: Staff

October 24, 2011

<http://www.myjournalcourier.com/news/education-35990-illinois-state.html>

Who is to blame for the fact that half of Illinois' high school students cannot read or solve math problems at their grade level?

That's the question we must ask after the Illinois State Board of Education released the results of last spring's standardized tests last week.

The state's top education officials respond by blaming the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. We wonder if that's akin to blaming the X-ray for detecting the broken leg.

Under NCLB guidelines, 85 percent of students must be proficient in reading and math by 2011. The bar is raised to 100 percent by 2014. These same percentages apply to science for high-schoolers.

Students in third through eighth grades, as well as 11th grade, take standardized tests to measure their adequate yearly progress in reading, math and science. This past year, about half of Illinois' 11th-graders, who take the Prairie State Achievement Exam, or PSAE, scored at or above the 85 percent benchmark — 51 percent in reading and math, and 49 percent in science. In all, 656 of Illinois' 666 public high schools failed to meet NCLB requirements.

Students in third through eighth grades, overall, scored below the 85 percent benchmark, with a few exceptions. Students in those grades take the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, or ISAT. In all, 1,892 of the state's 3,231 elementary and middle schools did not meet the federal guidelines.

Overall, 65 percent of Illinois' 4,321 schools failed to meet the federal standards. Last year, 51 percent of schools did not progress.

ISBE Chairman Gerry Chico says NCLB is "improperly labeling" students and schools as failing, because schools that are close to meeting the benchmark are still classified as missing the mark. Chico says the increase in failure rates indicates that NCLB has "lost its usefulness."

Illinois is seeking a federal waiver from the NCLB requirement that all students must pass standardized reading and math proficiency tests by 2014. President Barack Obama recently said the federal government would agree to waivers if the states were to be held more accountable for whatever educational progress students and schools actually achieved.

Unfortunately, Chico and the ISBE seem to feel that neither they, the teachers nor the students should be held accountable for these results. Perhaps the state board has "lost its usefulness."

Yes, statewide averages get brought down by poor results in low-income and inner-city areas. Inequalities in funding schools between rich and poor communities play a role. And yes, our nation's cultural loss of focus on education has left us in real danger of falling behind China, India and other emerging powers where parents and governments drive their children to succeed in school.

Can the U.S. regain its edge in the race to educate its youth to be competitive in the global economy?

We say it can happen only if federal and state education officials, rank-and-file educators, parents — and yes, our children themselves — decide that we are all accountable and resolve to do the hard work of turning these trends around.

Pointing fingers at others won't accomplish anything. We are all to blame, and if we don't come together to find solutions, we'll deserve the failures follow.

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Michigan districts moving closer to a nationwide K-12 curriculum

Kalamazoo Gazette The Kalamazoo Gazette

By: Julie Mack

October 25, 2011

http://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/index.ssf/2011/10/michigan_districts_moving_clos.html

Monday's Portage school board meeting was mainly a snooze. But there was a brief mention of a major reform that is largely going under the radar and yet could have a major impact on U.S. schools.

The reform is the fact that Michigan and 43 other states have adopted "common core" standards that are, essence, the country's first nationwide curriculum.

For the first time, there will be agreement between states about what children should learn at each grade, and there will be assessment tests that will allow -- at least in theory -- apples-to-apples comparisons.

Right now, every state has its own curriculum and its assessment tests. It makes it very, very hard for states to compare their academic results. The decentralization of American education also creates complications for the textbook industry, teacher training and for the millions of schoolchildren who move from one state to another each year.

Lynne Cowart, who is currently serving as curriculum director for Portage Public Schools, said Monday that the district currently is conducting an audit to see how the district needs to change to conform to the new common-core standards.

"There's no reason to believe this will be a dramatic change," she said, adding that her view is the "common-core standards are really quite good."

In 2013-14, the Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests will change to conform to the common-core assessment and the plan is to have a common test in math and language arts used by all the participating states.

States that haven't adopted the common core standards: Texas, Alaska, Minnesota, Montana, Virginia and Nebraska.

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